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The middle-class orientation of instructional materials being used for culturally deprived children in Target Area elementary schools caused the materials to have limited meaning for the children. Teachers wanted two basic changes in reading material. First, illustrations used in the reading materials should be relevant to the children's experiences. Second, school experiences should be enriched so that the beginning readers could move from an understanding of the illustrations (symbols of life as they know it) to an understanding of life in a middle-class society.

Accordingly, the new reading materials will deal with experiences of culturally deprived families. A reading resource teacher will be available to aid classroom teachers in working with students to improve their reading skills. Enrichment experiences will include field trips and more extensive use of audio-visual materials.

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DEVELOPMENT OF READING MATERIALS AND READING SKILLS IN TARGET AREA ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Sponsored Jointly by

THE MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

and

THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROJECT OF

THE COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELFARE COUNCIL OF HENNEPIN COUNTY, INC.

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DEVELOPMENT OF READING MATERIALS AND READING SKILLS IN TARGET AREA ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Problem:

Many of the teachers we talked with felt that the materials presented to the beginning reading students represented ideas foreign to anything these students had seen or experienced. The middle class orientation of their present reading material represents foreign symbols that have limited meaning for these small children with lower-class backgrounds. A brief review of Target Area statistics from Chapter III will illustrate the distance between Target Area children and the conventional white, middle-class, happy family used as a basis for many current readers.

The six Target Area elementary schools have 35 percent of the Negro and 23 percent of the Indian elementary school enrollment from a total of 76 elementary schools in the city. The two Target Areas contain approximately 7.9 percent of the population of the city (38,068 residents). The 1963 police contacts with individuals age 10-17 was 9.8 percent for the Target Areas compared with 4.9 percent for the city. Twenty-four percent of the city's A.F.D.C. cases, 16 percent of the Old Age Assistance cases, and 33 percent of the families on Relief live in the Target Areas. Twenty-three percent of the Target Area families had an annual income of less than $3,000 in 1960 and 44 percent of the Target Area adults (Over 25 years of age) had an education of eight years or less.

Reading test data indicate that Target Area students rank only slightly below the city median in second grade. However, as these students move through grades 3, 4, 5 and 6 they drop further and further below the median in their tested reading ability.

This statistical picture of our Target Areas takes on more meaning when these figures are interpreted by children. In talking with a first grade child he said he liked his brothers and sisters and told us the name of all nine of them; he told us about his aunt and uncle who came to live with them; his grandmother who lived with them and took care of the children at night; his two dogs and his cat with her four kittens. This home is an unbelievably small, disorganized, dirty,

three-room "apartment" with the toilet down the hall. This boy likes it here; he has fun with his brothers and sisters and his pets. Although he lives less than a mile from downtown he has never been downtown, he has never ridden on a bus (they stop in front of his building every five minutes), the Mississippi River is less than a mile from his home but he has never seen a river.

This story is repeated with many variations in talking with Target Area youngsters. They describe in varying degrees the extended family patterns; the transient fathers; moving from apartment to apartment; eating out of a can; buying lunch at the store because no one is home; mother fighting with "uncles" -- until the emerging pattern represents a life style of our Target Area children. This is not the life style represented by the pre-primer, primer and readers Target Area children must interpret.

The teachers in the Target Area schools are not interested in writing a torrid best seller, but they do want to see two basic changes in their reading material. First, illustrations their students can recognize; Negro, Indian and white children playing together and going to school together; fathers who don't come home from work with a brief case, wearing a suit and white shirt; children playing constructively in an apartment area where there aren't grassy yards and open parks; illustrations that can be translated to symbols and words for these beginning readers. Second, provide these beginning youngsters with an enriched school experience so that they can move from understanding illustrations and symbols of life as they see it to life as illustrated by our dominant society. Take them on many field trips where their observation is directed and they see what they are looking at; provide a wide variety of directed film experience, slides and film strips; provide in-school music lessons, dancing lessons, creative arts materials and in general build up their background so they have stories to tell. Teach them to tell stories, use their imagination, and convert the stories they tell to words they can see and know. Use their words, stories and experiences to

build small paperback books they can learn from and take home.

The materials produced in the demonstration project can be adapted to other Target Area classes as well as other schools in adjacent areas. Some of this material can be used by outlying and suburban schools in developing an understanding of life in our downtown areas.

Program:

The development of reading materials for elementary grades (1 through 6), which would deal with experiences meaningful to disadvantaged area children, rather than the conventional white, middle class, happy family used as a basis for current readers.

This reading material will be developed through the cooperative efforts of Target Area children, their classroom teachers, reading resource teachers and the writer coordinator.

This same team will work with students toward maximum development of each child's capability in reading.

In addition to the usual classroom activities, each participating classroom teacher will plan activities to broaden and enrich their students' backgrounds. Reading materials will be developed around students' backgrounds, in and out of school experiences, student imagination and meaningful life situations for these students.

One of the background enrichment activities for these children will be well-planned, developed and directed field trips. The Minneapolis area is rich in historic sites, cultural activities, professional sporting events, parks, rivers, museums, business and industry. The schools also have ready access to rural farm areas as well as several park areas that have been preserved in their natural state for student use.

Also during these visits realistic work roles can be shown and a depth of understanding developed for the role of work. Many occupations can be shown

ranging from top professionals to the most menial unskilled laboring jobs. Attention can be focussed on the training and educational requirements as well as the satisfaction and meaning of the work role.

Other planned and directed background activities will involve extensive use of movies; recordings, speakers and visiting performers and artists.

As the Target Area children in the demonstration classes learn to express themselves, their anecdotes, descriptions of their activities and experiences--imaginative stories and creative expressions will be recorded in many ways. In the early grades the teacher will be the recorder, using the chalk-board, tape recorder and large "walk in books". The "walk in books" will be designed so these youngsters can say the words--see the words--and feel the symbols that make up these words. As the students become more able, the relating and recording techniques will become more varied and comprehensive.

The recorded experiences and stories of the students will be collected and analyzed for vocabulary and content by the classroom teacher, the reading resource teacher and the writer coordinator. Based on this analysis reading material will be developed. This material will then be used with the experimental classes, revised and rewritten with the ultimate aim of producing simple paperback books. These books will be given to the children to take home after the students have read the books in class.

Reading Resource Teachers:

The reading resource teachers will assist the classroom teachers in working with students to improve their reading skills in content areas of science, mathematics and social studies. They will help in the utilization of community resources and in the organization and supervision of field trips. Special emphasis of the reading resource teacher will be placed on organizing and making available reading and audio-visual materials depicting the history and cultural contributions of Negroes, Indians and other ethnic groups. These resource teachers will carry the major responsibility for coordination with the writer coordinator in the

development of reading materials.

Writer Coordinator:

The writer coordinator will write and arrange for production of reading material for use in the demonstration classes. She will establish a reading supplies, equipment and production center within the curriculum development center. The writer coordinator will facilitate coordination between classroom teachers and reading resource teachers to insure the development of the most meaningful and usable reading materials.

Rationale:

The children in our Target Areas attend elementary schools that represent a one class culture. However, when they move into the junior high schools and senior high schools in Minneapolis they are confronted with a wide class range. This condition is created by the location of relatively small pockets of poverty surrounding the center of the city. The small attendance districts of the elementary schools draw from only a single neighborhood, while the junior and senior high school attendance districts cut across many neighborhoods and extend toward the edge of the city.

In order to make a successful transition from a lower class elementary school to the mixed class junior and senior high schools several abilities and strengths are needed. One needed strength is that of a broad background of experiences and understanding. Through many in-school experiences of directed field trips, music, art and physical education experiences; and vicarious experiences through an expanded audio-visual program, these Target Area children will be equipped to understand the culture in which they must compete.

Another major strength needed to compete in the secondary school system is competency in reading. As students move through our school system, they are faced more and more with strong subject matter orientation. Most of the information needed in these courses is contained in books and the key to mastery of this

material remains reading ability. As one of our local educators said: "A student who moves into our book-bound, subject-centered secondary schools without being able to read, is truly an academic cripple."

The ability to read well is also vital in the reduction of frustration. In our subject-oriented secondary schools constant confrontation with the printed word demands facility in reading to prevent frustration and dropout.

School satisfaction and success not only open doors to adult opportunity but it gives students an immediate sense of belonging. This is particularly true in our mixed class junior and senior high schools where a majority of the students see high school success as a prerequisite for college or entry into the labor market.

Reducing student frustration through improved reading can also increase teachers' awareness. Through the intensive study of their students' vocabulary and speech patterns teachers will become more aware of student problems. This awareness can be vital in the production of meaningful reading experiences and materials for Target Area children.

The general objectives of this proposal can be summarized as:

1. Enrich and expand Target Area students' background on which to build reading experiences.
2. Develop and produce reading material that will be meaningful to Target Area children.
3. Develop reading skills and broaden the background of Target Area children so they will not fall behind in reading skills as they move along in school.
4. Prevent school dropouts through increasing school success.
5. Increase teacher awareness of problems faced by their students and assist them in developing know-how to overcome these problems.

ADMINISTRATION

A reading team will be organized at Grant School. Six selected classrooms,

one at each grade level (grades 1 through 6), will participate.

Two reading resource teachers and one writer coordinator will be assigned t Grant School. They will work with grades one to six..

One stenographer will be provided for the project to assist in the collecti and production of reading materials.

Evaluation procedures will be developed by the Youth Development Project in cooperation with the Research Department of the Minneapolis Public Schools and t College of Education, University of Minnesota.

Evaluation will be established to follow students who participated in the program for amounts of time varying from as little as one year to as much as six years. Research evidence will be used as the basis for considering the program parts of the program for adoption, rejection or holding until greater need exists in the Minneapolis Schools.